CHAPTER 1

The Varieties of Pessimism

1.1 Four Pessimistic Theses

The purpose of this chapter is to set the appropriate context for Nietzsche's engagement with pessimism. This requires beginning with a survey of the forms that pessimism took as a philosophical theory in the nineteenth century. With its genesis in Schopenhauer, pessimism came to be associated with a variety of independent claims, with the term most commonly being deployed to refer to one or more theses from the following (non-exhaustive) list:

(1) *Historical Thesis*: History contains no significant 'progress'.
(2) *Modal Thesis*: Our world is the worst of all possible worlds that could viably exist.
(3) *Eudaemonic Thesis*: Genuine happiness is impossible.
(4) *Evaluative Thesis*: Life is not worth living; non-existence is preferable to existence.

Schopenhauer endorsed (1)–(4), using the term 'pessimism' (*Pessimismus*) only post 1844 loosely as an umbrella term to encompass all theses. Yet as we shall see, not all subsequent pessimists did so, and in the mid to late 1860s the term took on a more fixed meaning. Let us briefly elaborate upon each thesis in turn.

The Historical Thesis

'Progress' across history might be measured in a number of ways. For instance, one might track progress by the advancement toward social, moral, political, or aesthetic ideals. The denial that significant progress in any of these respects is possible via advances in the sciences, education, technology, and social reforms stands in stark opposition to the optimistic spirit of Enlightenment thinking. But there are three possible versions of

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this claim that ought to be distinguished. The first holds that the seemingly numerous contingencies of human history are merely different manifestations of the same *innate* human condition. For reasons we shall come to see shortly, Schopenhauer's idiosyncratic metaphysical framework leads him to explicitly endorse this version of the Historical Thesis. As he writes in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* (*WWR*): "[t]he true philosophy of history consists in the insight that throughout all these endless alterations with their chaotic noise, we are only ever faced with the same, identical, unchangeable essence that behaves the same today as yesterday and always" (*WWR2*: 461). That history is static in this sense does not, in and of itself, entail a kind of pessimism (after all, if the state of the world is optimal, such continuity might be cause for celebration). Rather, the pessimistic import of this claim is derived from its combination with the less controversial thesis that the actual world is significantly sub-optimal in various ways. What the Historical Thesis entails is that attempts to realise our ideals are ultimately futile. We shall come to see that all self-proclaimed pessimists endorsed this view, though for varying reasons.

Another version of the Historical Thesis is the view that the collection of beliefs, values, and practices that make up a particular society's 'culture' – or on stronger versions, across human civilisation broadly – has since degenerated from a now irretrievable 'golden age'. Although overarching themes of cultural degeneracy are apparent in Wagner's work, a large portion of the initial groundwork for this form of pessimism in German social thought was laid by the earlier romanticism of the eighteenth century, with its enthusiasm for antiquity and ancient Athens in particular. The efforts of the art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), for example, certainly cultivated an awe for Hellenism and an interpretation of it defined by the ideals of aesthetic sensitivity, splendour, creativity, and calmness – ideals that informed the Weimar classicism of Schiller and Goethe. However, the component of this cultural nostalgia that is characteristically 'pessimistic' is the idea that the identified 'golden age' is *irretrievable* for contemporary humanity. This cultural or social pessimism was a more explicit philosophical commitment in the intellectual sphere at the University of Basel in the mid to late nineteenth century, where it was developed by the historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) and the Swiss jurist and archaeologist Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), both of whom were influential interlocutors with Nietzsche during his Basel years. Burckhardt's denial of social progress, for instance, was grounded in his observation that the modern

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

progressive state follows a general cultural decline in Europe since the creative high point of the Italian Renaissance.[1] The idea that humans could themselves direct history for the better, overcoming the feelings of alienation produced by various social and economic disharmonies, was, for Burckhardt, naive.[2]

A third version of the Historical Thesis characteristically holds that *further* decline – be it moral, environmental, scientific, artistic, political, and so forth – is inevitable. Traces of this forward-looking 'doomsayer' pessimism can also be found in Burckhardt's concerns about the combination of industrialisation and nationalism developing across nineteenth-century Europe, predicting (with unfortunate accuracy) a coming era of militarisation, "national wars and international competition".[3] Eduard von Hartmann also clearly endorsed this thesis of decline with respect to *some* phenomena, if not all. For example, he anticipated that genius would continue to diminish, and mediocrity would flourish amidst an abundance of ever less original art, whose function would eventually decay into a mere temporary fix against lethargy. The result, Hartmann claimed, would be an artistic wasteland:

> Were the ancient Greeks to come alive today they would declare *with complete truth* our works of art in all departments to be thoroughly *barbarous*. (It is enough to think of our literary productions and stage-plays, statues and exhibitions, the products of architecture and especially the maddening beat of music). (*GBP*: 50)

Contemporary versions of this 'doomsayer' pessimism might, for example, be found in concerns over the inability to avoid impending climate disaster, capitalism's inability to sustain itself (combined with a view that alternative economic options are inferior), and the long-term ineffectiveness of nuclear deterrence.

The Modal Thesis

Popularised by Leibniz in the eighteenth century, 'optimism' is the view that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds. Optimism is typically derived from a particular version of theism, according to which God's benevolent and omnipotent nature entails that God could not fail to

[1] See Burckhardt (1860). [2] On these different types of cultural pessimism, see Bennett (2001).
[3] Burckhardt (1957: 278). For attention to Burckhardt's conception of culture and pessimistic themes, see Mommsen (1983).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

create an optimal universe, where optimal may be understood, for example, as the maximum amount of happiness compatible with supremely elegant physical laws. One modal version of pessimism is the reversal of this position. In one of Schopenhauer's many inversions of a Leibnizian thesis, he famously considers "earnestly and honestly" a proof that this world "is in fact the *worst* of all possible worlds" (*WWR2*: 598), and qualifies 'possible' as not "what someone can dream up, but what really can exist and persist" (*WWR2*: 598).

Schopenhauer's justification for the Modal Thesis involves harnessing a proto-fine-tuning hypothesis, according to which the existence of any life at all is dependent on precariously positioned variables. On the empirical grounds that even slight changes in the delicate conditions of the planet – atmospheric pressure, planetary orbits, the chemical composition of the air, species' already meagre capacities for survival – would make life unviable, Schopenhauer concludes that "[t]he world is consequently as bad as it can possibly be, if it is to exist at all" (*WWR2*: 599). However, the vulnerabilities of Schopenhauer's argument for the Modal Thesis are well known,[4] and since what is of philosophical interest about pessimism with respect to the aims of this book lies elsewhere, we shall not rehearse them here. It is an argument that he entertains only a significant time after he had already established his philosophical system; it does not come up in his writings again (unlike other pessimistic themes); and it is wholly independent of his reasons for defending the Historical, Eudaemonic, and Evaluative Theses.

Partly due to these vulnerabilities, the Modal Thesis is a version of pessimism that we find only Schopenhauer defending among the major professed pessimists of the nineteenth century. In her *Der Pessimismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (*PVG*) of 1884, Olga Plümacher lamented the adoption of the term 'pessimism' to describe her philosophical camp in the dispute insofar as it misleadingly suggested the endorsement of the mere converse of Leibnizian optimism. As Plümacher rightly points out, the denial of the claim that the actual world is the *best* possible does not equate to the claim that the actual world is the *worst* possible. The position of most opponents to Leibnizian optimism was that while the world may be sub-optimal, it is nevertheless all-things-considered of positive value. The real debate, according to Plümacher, occurs at the level of *this* claim, which she labels 'meliorism' and defines explicitly as holding that "the

[4] See Janaway (1999: 321–322). For a charitable reconstruction of the argument, see Bather Woods (2014: chapter 3).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

world's existence is to be affirmed [*die Welt-existenz eine zu Bejahende*]" and that "being is to be preferred to non-being [*das Sein dem Nichtsein vorzuziehende sei*]" (*PVG*: 2). Along with Hartmann and Schopenhauer (in his more careful moments), Plümacher aims to deny 'meliorism' and holds that this task does not require anything beyond understanding the (dis)value of existence in relative terms as a *comparison* between being and non-being. *This* form of pessimism will be discussed imminently.

To emphasise both the diversity of positions that could described as 'pessimistic' and the extent of the disagreements among self-proclaimed pessimists in the nineteenth century, it is worth mentioning yet another position on the Modal Thesis. Plümacher rejected this form of pessimism as deploying meaningless superlatives (*PVG*: 3–4), but while Hartmann agreed that Schopenhauer's argument for it was a "manifest sophism" (*PU*, XIII: 12), he nevertheless had very different reasons for rejecting it. Not only did Hartmann retain the application of the superlative modal categories 'best' and 'worst', but he – a card-carrying pessimist – even *agreed* with Leibniz that the actual world is the *best* possible: "We have seen that in the existing world everything is arranged in the wisest and best manner, and that it may be looked upon as the best of all possible worlds, but that nevertheless it is thoroughly wretched, and worse than none at all" (*PU*, XIII: 125).

How could a pessimist accept the thesis most closely associated with optimism? While the metaphysical grounds for Hartmann's 'optimism' here are both complex and dubious (see *PU*, XII: 356–368), they are not as inconsistent as it may first appear. To say that this is the *best* of all possible worlds is compatible with it being the *most acceptable amongst a range of terrible options*. Moreover, this is equally compatible with the view that the best *possible* world is still one in which it is *not worth living*.

The Eudaemonic Thesis

The claim that genuine happiness is impossible is a central feature of Schopenhauer's pessimism. At present, this general formulation is compatible with a number of different claims. This ambiguity is deliberate, since this Eudaemonic Thesis is much more widely accepted in the history of philosophy than the Historical, Modal, or Evaluative Theses. For instance, if, like Schopenhauer, we understand 'genuine' to (at least partly) mean *lasting*, and 'happiness' to equate to the *satisfaction of desires* (*Befriedigung*), then the endorsement of the Eudaemonic Thesis can be found in traditions as diverse as Stoicism and Buddhism, and in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophies of Rousseau, Augustine, and Kant.[5] The latter is of especial interest, given (i) Kant's significant influence on major players in the pessimism dispute and that (ii) Kant is not traditionally thought of as a *pessimist* in any sense.

Kant generally understands happiness in terms of the fulfilment of desires or inclinations. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he defines happiness as "the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations [*Neigungen*]" (*G*: 12), and later in the *Critique of Practical Reason* as "the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will" (*CPR*: 104).[6] But Kant also holds that happiness is essentially "indeterminate" (*G*: 28) insofar as its content is highly variable across persons and is subject to rapid change. The unfortunate upshot of this is that because the capacity for wanting is infinite, humans never really know what it is that they want (*G*: 28). In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant says much the same, describing happiness as an "unstable" (*CJ*: 297) concept, and that the nature of human beings is "not of the sort to call a halt anywhere in possession and enjoyment and to be satisfied" (*CJ*: 298).

Kant goes much further than simply considering desires to be inexhaustible. He also endorses the principle that desire implies pain. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), he writes that "[p]ain must proceed every gratification" and that pain is the "incentive to every activity" (*APV*: 131–132). Because of his endorsement of this principle, Kant also considers the satisfaction of desires (i.e., happiness) as the deliverance from pain, and thus essentially negative. Happiness, then, will always be something 'beyond', a future state we imagine: "To feel one's life, to enjoy oneself, is then nothing else but to feel constantly impelled to pass beyond the present state (which, consequently, has to be a frequently recurring grief)" (*APV*: 133). It is for this reason that Kant describes inclinations or desires as "*burdensome* to a rational being" (*CPR*: 99).

Since, for Kant, genuine and lasting happiness is impossible, and striving for it a source of pain, he thinks that a life that is assessed in purely hedonic terms is bound to be valueless. Kant writes that any calculation about the value of existence made "merely by *what one enjoys*"

[5] I do not use 'eudaemonic' here to refer to the view that virtue is necessary or sufficient for happiness, as the term is often understood to mean. Both Kant and Schopenhauer reject that view. I use the term more broadly to refer to happiness.

[6] In the same text he considered happiness as the satisfaction of "all inclinations together . . . which can be brought into a tolerable system" (*CPR*: 63).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is only ever going to be "less than zero". He continues: "For who would start life anew under the same conditions . . . or even according to a new and self-designed plan . . . which would, however, still be aimed merely at enjoyment?" (*CJ*: 301). Four years earlier in the *Speculative Beginning of Human History*, Kant writes that "[o]ne must have a poor understanding of life's true value if one can still wish that it should be longer than it actually is, for that would only prolong a permanent game of struggling with toil and trouble" (*SB*: 58).

As we shall find in this chapter, the parallels between Kant's and Schopenhauer's analysis of the nature of happiness are striking. In virtue of this, it is not wholly surprising that this could form the basis for an interpretation of Kant as a type of pessimist, a strategy that we shall come to see was invoked by Hartmann as part of a defence against attacks by neo-Kantians (see Section 2.3). Why pessimists like Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Plümacher, and others accepted the Eudaemonic Thesis – the claim that genuine happiness is impossible – will be elucidated in detail in the following section. Importantly, what distinguishes them from at least some of the traditions mentioned is that they took its truth to be a significant reason for accepting the Evaluative Thesis.

The Evaluative Thesis

As a result of increasing attention being paid to Schopenhauer's philosophy, by the mid to late 1860s philosophical pessimism came to be more precisely defined and commonly understood as the negative answer to a fundamental philosophical question: 'What is the value of life?' or 'Why continue living at all?' Pessimism proper is the view that life is not worth living, that non-existence is preferable to existence, for everybody, in every circumstance. It is with this thesis that traditional philosophical enemies – materialists, neo-Kantians, positivists, theologians, and others – were unified in an attempt to refute or deflate. How does one estimate the value of life? Pessimism and optimism are both premised upon the claim that the 'value of life' is both a coherent concept and in principle knowable. These are both assumptions that we shall see Nietzsche eventually come to challenge, but it is important to specify exactly what is at stake between the pessimists and those who found life to be very much worth living, and perhaps even optimally good. Where only implicit in the work of the participants in the pessimism dispute, I shall attempt to do this in a partly reconstructive manner using contemporary terminology.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

When one states that X's life is good/bad, worth living/not worth living, better/worse than Y's life, one is making a judgement about the *total value* of a subject's existence. A life is worth living when its total value, all things considered, is positive (i.e., above zero). A life is not worth living when its total value, all things considered, is negative (i.e., below zero). The value in question has at least three pertinent characteristics: it is (1) *final* (i.e., valuable for its own sake, as opposed to instrumentally), (2) *pro-tanto* (i.e., always carries valence but is in principle defeasible), and (3) *prudential* (i.e., it is a benefit, or is good for an agent). For the pessimist and the optimist, the total value of a life is most commonly determined by its *contents*, that is, the sum of the goods attained that are thought to constitute one's welfare. Popular candidates often include, for example, pleasure, preference-satisfaction, virtue, achievement, knowledge,; friendship, and so forth. The temporal distribution of these goods may also partly determine the value of life. For example, it seems at least plausible that a life that starts off extremely well but consistently declines over time is *worse* than the inverse type of life with the same sum total of value, where the life starts out horribly but consistently improves and peaks at its end.

However, it ought to be noted that since the generally considered end of the pessimism dispute at the beginning of the twentieth century, the total value of life has sometimes been thought explicitly to be the sum total of not just the contents of a life, but the contents *in addition to* the value that life *itself* has. On most versions of this view, the mere fact of being alive – or on more restricted versions of this view, a *person's* life – has (final, pro-tanto, prudential) value, and accordingly, the scales that balance the value of a life all things considered are weighted towards the positive from the outset. Thomas Nagel, for example, writes:

> There are elements which, if added to one's experience, make life better; there are other elements which . . . make life worse. But what remains when these are set aside is not merely neutral: it is emphatically positive. Therefore life is worth living even when the bad elements of experience are plentiful, and the good ones too meager to outweigh the bad ones on their own. The additional positive weight is supplied by experience itself.[7]

If this view is correct, the pessimist has to show that the horrors of existence are sufficiently bad to outweigh the sum total of both the *contents* of a life plus life's *intrinsic* goodness. While there are good reasons to be

[7] Nagel (1979: 2). This view is echoed by Richard Momeyer (1988: 22), and more recently Uriah Kreigel (2019). For a general discussion of the distinction between neutral and positive views of life itself, see Kagan (2012: 259–261).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sceptical of life itself having positive valence,[8] the pessimists of the nineteenth century took life to be *so* bad that any positive value available to a person would pale in comparison to the negative.

Since the Evaluative Thesis was established as the de facto definition of pessimism from the beginning of Nietzsche's published writing, and it was this thesis that he primarily responded to, I shall henceforth use the term 'pessimism' to refer exclusively to it, unless otherwise stated. I shall now aim to present and disentangle the reasons traditionally given in support of this brand of pessimism.

1.2 The *Defence*: Arguments for Pessimism

There are generally three distinct types of argument for pessimism: (1) metaphysical, (2) hedonic, and (3) idealistic. 'Metaphysical' arguments seek to establish the truth of pessimism on the grounds that the world is *inherently contradictory*. 'Hedonic' arguments seek to establish the truth of pessimism on account of the *prevalence of suffering over happiness*. 'Idealistic' arguments seek to establish the truth of pessimism on the grounds that the ultimate values we hold – that is, the moral, political, aesthetic ideals that orientate our lives in meaningful ways – cannot be actualised. These arguments were sometimes deployed collectively, as in the case of Schopenhauer. But others – notably Hartmann, Taubert, Plümacher, and Mainländer – were more selective in which they endorsed. By considering each argument in turn, we will gain a clearer picture of just how diverse philosophical pessimism was in the mid to late nineteenth century. Only then can we begin to think about where Nietzsche fits into the dispute.

A 'Metaphysical' Argument

Metaphysical arguments for pessimism attempt to establish that the world ought not to be, that its non-existence is preferable to its existence, from observations about its essential nature. The most innovative of such arguments depends upon a distinctively Schopenhauerian understanding of its major premise: the world we experience is an inherently

[8] For a plausible critique of the intrinsic value view, see Lee (2022). Lee describes the converse view that life itself is intrinsically *bad* as a "non-starter" (Lee 2022: 2). However, a coherent version of it may be endorsed by Schopenhauer and Bahnsen in their metaphysical arguments for pessimism (see section below on 'Metaphysical' Arguments).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contradictory manifestation of its underlying singular essence as a blind, arational striving 'Will'.[9] Fully appreciating this argument requires acknowledging the Kantian-inspired conceptual framework that Schopenhauer adopted, according to which the mind is not simply a passive receiver of data from the world around us, but rather mediates experience through the conceptual apparatus that make it possible in the first place. For Kant (and Schopenhauer), these are the a priori 'forms of intuition' of space and time, merely formal features of *how* we perceive objects, not things in themselves that exist independently of us. As a result, we are left with a double-aspect view of the world: how it *appears* or is *represented* to us – the world of *phenomena* – on the one hand, and the world as it is *in-itself*, unconditioned, on the other.

Unlike Kant, however, Schopenhauer holds that we can have 'immediate' (i.e., non-representational) knowledge of the thing in-itself, if only *approximately*, via consciousness of our own volitions (see *WWR2*: 208–209; *WWR1*, 'Appendix': 463, 536). The argument for this view is well known and, for our purposes, need not be rehearsed here. What is important is Schopenhauer's claim that this introspective method reveals that what I am in essence is Will (*Wille*): I am an embodied being prone to wants and needs, a constant striving, ultimately to ensure the perpetuation of life (*WWR1*, §60: 353). From here, Schopenhauer comes to make the famous claim, and the subject of Book Two of *WWR1*, that the *world* is Will. In stark opposition to (what Schopenhauer interprets as) Kant's claim that there is a *plurality* of things-in-themselves – a speculation forbidden by Kant's own framework, according to Schopenhauer – he defends a strict ontological monism in which *Wille zum Leben*, or 'will to life', is the essence of everything in the phenomenal world. What we experience are merely manifestations of this purposeless, blind, arational striving force or 'Will', individuated by the a priori forms of space and time. This Will "which is objectified in human life as it is every appearance, is a striving without aim or end [*ein Streben ohne Ziel und ohne Ende*]" (*WWR1*, §58: 347). The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) – the principle that there is no fact or truth that lacks a sufficient reason why it should be so, and not otherwise – is, relative to its pre-Kantian status in metaphysics, now demoted to a merely regulative principle *within* the phenomenal world of experience: "The principle of sufficient reason explains the connections between appearances, but not the appearances

[9] I outline this argument in more detail in Hassan (2021a).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

themselves. So philosophy cannot use these principles to search for either an efficient cause or a final cause of the world as a whole" (*WWR1*, §15: 108).

In Books Two and Four of *WWR1* – and continued in the 1838 *On the Will in Nature* – Schopenhauer sets out to elucidate the nature of phenomenal manifestations of the Will. He finds that as Will, each organism embodies *conflict*, both within itself and with other competing manifestations of Will. There are two symptoms of this "internal rupture [*Entzweiung mit sich selbst*] that is essential to the will" (*WWR1*, §27: 171) to which Schopenhauer points in order to substantiate the claim that phenomenal existence is inherently contradictory.

The first symptom can be recognised, Schopenhauer argues, in the data afforded by the hard sciences. We soon realise that humans, animals, plants, and even non-organic entities in the fields of chemistry and magnetism are subjects of conflict, growing, and striving: "everywhere in nature we see contest, we see struggle, we see victory changing hands" (*WWR1*, §27: 171). In strikingly Darwinian-sounding passages, Schopenhauer explains how the conflicted nature of the Will is most clearly observed at the grade of objectification in the animal kingdom, where each individual animal is either the prey or rival of some other. He offers examples from lower down the scale of wasp species that lay their eggs in the larvae of other insects, and "the first thing the hatching brood does is to slowly destroy the larvae as they emerge" (*WWR1*, §27: 172), all the way up to the vicious fight for survival between the greater mammals (e.g., *WWR2*: 369–370). His most vivid example of inherent conflict in phenomenal manifestations of Will is afforded by the bulldog ant of Australia: "when cut in half, the tail and the head begin to fight: the head attacks the tail with its teeth and the tail bravely defends itself by stinging the head: the fight usually takes about half an hour until they die or are dragged off by other ants" (*WWR1*, §27: 172). As he writes:

> the nullity and futility of the striving of the whole of appearance becomes easier to grasp in the simple lives of animals, which are easily surveyed. The variety of ways they are organized in this case, the artfulness of the means by which each adapts to its element and its prey, is in clear contrast with the lack of any sort of lasting final goal [*Endzweckes*]; instead of this only momentary comfort, fleeting pleasure conditioned by lack, much and lengthy suffering, constant struggle, the war of all, each a hunter and each hunted, distress, lack, need, and anguish, cries and howls are presented: and this continuing throughout all eternity, or until the crust of the planet breaks apart once more. (*WWR2*: 369)

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This universal strife is necessarily how the Will manifests itself: "the will to life *must devour its own flesh* because in the world of appearance nothing at all exists besides it, and it is a hungry will; hence the hierarchy of its appearances, each of which lives at the expense of the other" (*PP2*, §173). The inherent contradiction of the phenomenal world is, then, partly grounded in the reality that the phenomena that are in vicious competition with each other to survive are manifestations of the *same* Will.

A second way in which the phenomenal manifestation of the Will illustrates an internal tension or contradiction, Schopenhauer argues, is in the subordination of the individual will-to-life to that of the species. The metaphysics of sexual impulses betrays how nature seeks a surplus of 'life' – ever more manifestations of the Will – and attains this via "implanting a certain delusion [*Wahn*] in the individual that makes what in truth is good only for the species appear to be good for the individual", all the while consciously believing that "he is serving himself" (*WWR2*: 554). The idea is that humans and animals exist with particularly dominant sexual instincts, yet while these appear to the individual as prudentially driven, they are simply a deceptive means of propagating these species as a whole, effecting a greater manifestation of the Will. This is an insight that Darwin explicitly approved of, citing Schopenhauer on this point in chapter 20 of *The Descent of Man* in 1871.

It might be tempting to ground the 'metaphysical' argument for pessimism in the first step taken in this story: the Kantian distinction between how the world *appears* to us and how it really is *in-itself*. Because the world we experience is our representation and is ontologically subordinate to the world in-itself as purposeless Will, it is imbued with a sense of emptiness or vanity (*Nichtigkeit*) and illusoriness (*Scheinbarkeit*), characteristic of an "insubstantial dream" or "ghostly phantasm" (*luftgebilde*) (*WWR1*, §17: 123). However, while illusoriness or ontological dependence *may* be a necessary condition for pessimism, it is not immediately clear how it could be a sufficient condition. That, it seems, would require additional and robust epistemic-axiological premises that Schopenhauer does not explicitly defend. As Sebastian Gardner notes: "life's dream-likeness does not of itself make life a *bad* dream or a dream that *ought not* to be dreamt".[10] Rather, pessimism is arrived at in the following way.

As we have already noted, Schopenhauer's Kantian commitments mean that the PSR is off the table as a means of justifying or endowing a

[10] Gardner (2015: 114).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meaning to the world and its contents. Instead, the principle applies ubiquitously *within* the world of experience, and cannot apply to the Will:

> if someone dares to raise the question why there should not be nothing at all, rather than this world, then the world cannot be justified by itself; no reason, no final cause of its existence can be found in it and it cannot be shown that it exists for its own sake, i.e. for its own advantage. – Of course given my theory, this can be explained by the fact that the principle of its existence is explicitly a groundless principle, namely blind will to life which, *as thing in itself*, cannot be subject to the principle of sufficient reason, which is merely the form of appearances and which is the only thing through which any Why is justified. This is also in agreement with the constitution of the world: for only a blind, not a seeing will could put itself in the situation we find ourselves in. (*WWR2*: 594)

For Schopenhauer, the relation between the world as it is in-itself and the world of experience is not causal; rather, the two are sides of the same coin: they are the same reality, considered from different perspectives. But as manifestations of the Will in the world we experience, every being is *individuated*: the PSR governs a phenomenal reality structured a priori by space, time, and causality in which there *appear* to be a plurality of wills. It is this individuation (*principium individuationis*) that, as discussed in the ways earlier, leads to the strife and vicious conflict amongst manifestations of the Will, and is itself an "expression of the contradiction [*der Ausdruck des Widerspruchs*] that afflicts the will to life from within" (*WWR1*, §61: 359; cf. §69: 425).[11] This explains Schopenhauer's description of "every individuality" as a "special error, a misstep" (*WWR2*: 508).

It is this understanding of the world as a meaningless conflict – a "burlesque distortion" and "irreconcilable dissonance" (*PP2*, §156: 271) – that substantiates pessimism. While this contradictory and endless striving gives rise, among sentient creatures, to great suffering and pain (as the next section explores), this fact is not itself what grounds pessimism according to the 'metaphysical' argument. Rather, it is what that suffering is *indicative* of: the essential irrationality and contradictoriness of phenomenal existence. As Schopenhauer writes: "The character of things of this world, namely the human world, is not so much *imperfection*, as is often

[11] Julian Young's metaphor best captures this reversal of the PSR in service of pessimism. For Schopenhauer, he writes, it is *not* that the world is "a turbulent madhouse presided over by a ruler who is himself insane, a crazed willer of contradictory goals", but rather the world is analogous to "a concentration camp whose inmates, in order to survive, are compelled to destroy each other by a sadistic, 'devilish', yet coldly consistent governor". See Young (1987: 75–76).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

claimed, but rather *distortion* in things moral, intellectual, physical, in everything" (*PP2*, §156a: 274).

Nevertheless, as we shall see, the 'metaphysical' argument was not the argument that *primarily* occupied the attention of combatants with the pessimism dispute of the mid to late nineteenth century. While a version of it was defended in the 1880s by Julius Bahnsen in his *Der Widerspruch im Wissen und Wesen der Welt* (*WWW*), the debate typically focused upon the attempt to defend pessimism on the grounds of the essential ubiquity of suffering.

'Hedonic' Arguments

Hedonic pessimism, in its most general form, is comprised of just two components:

Descriptive Component: Life's suffering essentially outweighs life's pleasures.
Evaluative Component: Life is not worth living; non-existence is preferable to existence.

Both of these claims were endorsed by the majority of the proponents of pessimism in the nineteenth century. In chapter 46 of *WWR2*, Schopenhauer successively expresses a clear commitment to each component:

> Before confidently stating that life is a good that we should desire or one for which we should be grateful, just stop and compare the sum of all possible joys that a human being can have in his life with the sum of all possible sufferings that can afflict him in his life. I think that the balance will not be hard to determine. (*WWR2*: 591)

> [W]e should be sorry rather than glad about the existence of the world; . . . its non-existence would be preferable to its existence; . . . it is something that fundamentally should not be. (*WWR2*: 591–592; cf. *PP2*, §156: 269)

Similarly, Hartmann plainly endorses the descriptive component in his claim that "pain not only preponderates in the world in general to a high degree, but also in each single individual, even him who is placed in the most favourable circumstances conceivable" (*PU*, XI: 76), and endorses the evaluative component shortly afterwards: "The remit of individual life is, then, that all is surrendered; that, as the Preacher sees, 'All is vanity', i.e. illusory, worthless" (*PU*, XIII: 78). Plümacher, too, characterises and subscribes to pessimism as the view that "the sum of displeasure outweighs

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the sum of pleasure; consequently the non-being of the world would be better than its being [*die Summe der Unlust überwiegt die Summe der Lust; folglich wäre das Nichtsein der Welt besser als deren Sein*]" (*PVG*: 1). This same view is echoed by Philipp Mainländer in his 1876 *Die Philosophie der Erlösung* (*PE*: 467).

But a tacit assumption needs to be made explicit if the evaluative component is to be *justified* by the descriptive component. In order to have a valid *argument*, we must reveal the suppressed premise stating the truth of hedonism: the view that pleasure is the only intrinsic good, and suffering the only intrinsic bad. For some proponents of this argument (i.e., Schopenhauer), this premise remains a tacit assumption, while for others (i.e., Hartmann, Plümacher, Mainländer, Taubert) it is made explicit. Following Hartmann, Plümacher, for instance, is explicit in taking pleasure and pain to be the sole measure of life's worth: "Only the eudaimonological criterion is decisive for the value or disvalue of the world's existence, it is something final which we cannot surpass, and all other criteria must be in accord with it" (*PVG:* 137). Since the entirety of Chapter 7 will address the role of hedonism in establishing philosophical pessimism, and Nietzsche's critique of this role, I shall grant its truth for now. Instead, it will be worthwhile in this section to elucidate the different ways in which pessimists sought to substantiate the descriptive component.

The thesis that life's suffering outweighs life's pleasures can been defended on both a posteriori and a priori grounds. The former strategy involves harnessing abundant empirical evidence of suffering and misery as a means of tipping the hedonic scales toward the negative. Such evidence may include human-induced horrors: the North Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, the Holocaust, persecution and torment under the Spanish Inquisition, the widespread sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church, the billions of animals bred for slaughter or exploitation as a result of profit-driven industrial farming. The evidence may also include the horrors of the natural world: the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 and the deadly spread of AIDS and malaria, to take but a minuscule sample of the world's cruelty. Alternatively, the a priori strategy for establishing the descriptive component of pessimism takes the relations between the concepts of pleasure, satisfaction, suffering, and striving to be such that they do not allow for a hedonic net-positive to ever arise. This type of argument is not a modern development, but, as we shall see shortly, has recognisable antecedents in Epicurean and Stoic traditions. It is crucial to note as a preliminary, however, that while pessimists have

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historically offered both types of argument to establish the descriptive component of pessimism, they have also often given principled reasons for a reluctance to rest their case entirely on either the a priori strategy, as in the case of some, or entirely on the a posteriori strategy, as in the case of others. To best elucidate these reasons for divergent methodologies, it will be worthwhile to briefly compare the respective approaches of Schopenhauer and Hartmann.

In each volume of *WWR*, Schopenhauer describes numerous empirical cases of misery in characteristically evocative terms. Indeed, exposure to vivid depictions of life's miseries is very often where his pessimism can appear the most alluring. In a typical passage of this nature, Schopenhauer claims that honest reflection upon the reality will lead to exactly this:

> Finally, if we were to call everyone's attention to the terrible pains and suffering their lives are constantly exposed to, they would be seized with horror: and if you led the most unrepentant optimist through the hospitals, military wards, and surgical theatres, through the prisons, torture chambers and slave stalls, through battlefields and places of judgement, and then open for him all the dark dwellings of misery that hide from cold curiosity, and finally let him peer into Ugolino's starvation chamber, then he too would surely come to see the nature of this best of all possible worlds. Where else did *Dante* get the material for his hell if not from this actual world of ours? (*WWR1*, §59: 351)

Schopenhauer is no less attentive to the systematic suffering inherent to the natural world. In a well-known passage, Schopenhauer recalls the experience of the German-Dutch botanist and geologist Franz Junghuhn during his time in Java:

> *Junghuhn* describes seeing in Java an immense field completely covered with skeletons, which he took to be a battlefield: but these were only skeletons of tortoises, huge ones, five feet long, three feet wide, and equally tall, which follow this path from the ocean to lay their eggs, and then are attacked by wild dogs (*Canis rutilans*) which work together to lay them on their backs so they can tear off the bottom breast-plate, the small shield on the stomach, and devour them alive. But a tiger will frequently fall on the dogs. The whole misery has repeated itself thousands upon thousands of times, year in, year out. This is what these tortoises are born to. What have they done wrong to deserve this torture? What is the point of this whole scene of abomination? (*WWR2*: 369–370)

Schopenhauer frequently offers such cases. Nevertheless, in *WWR1*, §59, he is explicit that the empirical case for pessimism ought to function

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

only as an auxiliary supplement to his a priori argument(s), that is, as a means of harnessing the psychological impact of confronting concrete cases of suffering to "arouse a much more vivid conviction" (*WWR1*, §59: 349) in the thesis, *already established*, that life is not worth living. The justification for this strategy, I argue, resides in an eagerness to avoid two objections to pessimism that eventually became commonplace:

(1) That any current preponderance of suffering over pleasure is a product of contingent social circumstance, and leaves open the possibility of future social progress.
(2) That pessimism is merely reducible to one's psychological disposition or mood.

A purely empirical case for pessimism could at best offer a relatively mild inductive argument, according to which the preponderance of suffering in the world *now* and in the *past* gives us reason to think that future circumstances of life will be the same. But for Schopenhauer this is unsatisfactory, and would amount to a "simple declamation over human misery" (*WWR1*, §59: 350). This vulnerability was articulated most clearly by the psychologist James Sully in his critique of pessimism in 1877: "even if the pessimists succeed in showing that the world, as it has hitherto existed, is an appalling excess of misery, there remains the question whether this balance is a fixed quantity, or whether it may be indefinitely reduced, and even transformed into a positive remainder of good" (*PHC*: 357).

Since Schopenhauer intends his pessimism to run deeper than a mere commentary upon contemporary states of affairs, and instead seeks to establish the ubiquity of suffering independent of contingent social circumstance, he takes a priori argument to be necessary in defending its descriptive component.

Schopenhauer also anticipated that resting the case for pessimism solely on balancing endless empirical data would lend itself to item (2) above: the charge of psychological bias or "one-sidedness" (*WWR1*, §59: 350). The attempt to collapse pessimism as a *philosophical* view in this way became a primary strategy in the pessimism dispute from the 1870s onwards, with Nietzsche launching a version of it himself in his later writings (see Chapter 5). However, Schopenhauer is adamant that pessimism is philosophically *justifiable* when "starting out from the universal and demonstrating a priori" (*WWR1*, §59: 350) that the suffering of life will always outweigh its pleasure.

Interestingly, Hartmann is motivated by the very same concern as Schopenhauer: to avoid objections (1) and (2). However, contra

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Schopenhauer, Hartmann takes an "inductive" and empirical method to be the correct means of doing so. Hartmann's conception of "induction" here is broad, and simply expresses a commitment to the intelligibility of experience via the principles of the empirical sciences and inference to the best explanation. Part of Hartmann's justification for a primarily empirical approach is his conviction that Schopenhauer's a priori argument contains significant flaws that, consequently, leaves him open to speculations about the psychological origins of his pessimism. To appreciate these divergent methods, it is necessary to first present Schopenhauer's a priori argument.

Schopenhauer's a priori argument for the descriptive component of pessimism has received a significant amount of critical attention in the secondary literature.[12] It will suffice for the purposes of our investigation to simply outline its basic commitments. It begins from a minimalistic account of human nature: as essentially embodied beings, it is fundamental to the human condition to be prone to needs and wants, and to strive to satisfy them. For living things, as manifestations of the will-to-life, it is the *striving* (*streben*) to satisfy needs and wants that is the essence of life, and not any *final* need or want (*WWR1*, §56: 335). Expressive of this striving is each organism's unchosen disposition to direct itself towards self-preservation and reproduction (*WWR1*, §60: 353).

From here, the argument for the thesis that life's suffering (always) outweighs life's pleasures proceeds via four steps. First, like Kant, Schopenhauer conceives of happiness (*Glück*) in terms of the satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) of desires: "the achievement of [the will's] goal is *satisfaction*, contentment, happiness" (*WWR1*, §56: 336). But, since we are in essence striving beings, there is no *ultimate* or *final* satisfaction. Any achievement of our goals quickly brings a fresh episode of willing, hence 'happiness' as a lasting phenomenon is intrinsically elusive. One of the upshots of this conception of ever-regenerating desires is that happiness is more easily *remembered* or *expected* than it is experienced in the present. Schopenhauer holds that it is because of our disposition to perpetually strive that, unlike pain (which can persist indefinitely with relatively stable intensity), positive feelings associated with happiness as satisfaction swiftly fade, and never reflect their anticipated significance: happiness "always lies in the future, or in the past, and the present is like a small dark cloud driven by the wind over the sunlit plains: both in front of it and behind it everything is bright, it alone casts a constant shadow" (*WWR2*: 588).

[12] Landmark treatments of the argument include, for example, Janaway (1999); Young (1987: 135–150); Cartwright (1988); Migotti (1995). For my own analysis, see Hassan (2021b).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, this insatiability is not sufficient to establish that life's sufferings will always outweigh life's pleasures. Crucial to the argument is a second step that defends a particular analysis of the *phenomenal quality* of striving, according to which it is intrinsically tied to two specific kinds of pain. According to Schopenhauer, striving – that is, the determined pursuit of a goal – occurs because the agent experiences a lack (*Mangel*) or need (*Bedürftigkeit*): "All striving comes from lack, from a dissatisfaction with one's condition" (*WWR1*, §56: 336); "all willing [*wollen*] as such comes from want" (*WWR1*, §65: 390). The experience of a lack, Schopenhauer claims, is a painful one: "the basis of all willing is need, lack, and thus pain" (*WWR1*, §57: 338); the "great violence of willing is already immediately and in and of itself a constant source of suffering . . . because all willing as such comes from want, and thus from suffering" (*WWR1*, §65: 390; cf. §38). While this pain (*Schmerz*) is often physical (as in the case of hunger or thirst), Schopenhauer tends to emphasise its mental manifestations via unease or discomfort in yearning. But as well as there being a degree of pain that *causes* us to strive, Schopenhauer holds that the experience of resistance to one's goal that is intrinsic to striving is how suffering is defined: "When an obstacle is placed between [the will] and its temporary goal, we call this inhibition *suffering*" (*WWR1*, §56: 336). This second kind of pain – suffering from frustrated resistance – is essential to the argument, for simply acknowledging that pain is required to provoking striving would otherwise be compatible with that striving as being, on the whole, an amply pleasurable experience.

Schopenhauer should not be interpreted here as claiming that *every* episode of striving is severe agony. This would be erroneous, given that there are many telic activities in which it is *in virtue* of a drawn-out struggle that people pleasurably pursue a goal – sports, crossword puzzles, video games, mountaineering, and so forth – a fact Schopenhauer himself acknowledges (*WWR1*, §55: 332; *PP1*, §6: 385–386). Some commentators have taken this to show that Schopenhauer's argument relies upon a fatal ambiguity, taking the 'dissatisfaction' inherent to striving as a verbal slider that carries with it connotations of suffering into a context in which it is normally absent.[13] But this misconstrues Schopenhauer's commitment to the principle that so long as we strive, we suffer. His point is that all striving by nature involves *some amount* of painfully felt frustration, a frustration that all too easily grows in degree relative to the amount of

[13] For instance, see Cartwright (1988: 59); Migotti (1995: 649); Carroll (2003: 36); Vasalou (2013: 139); Richardson (2020: 143).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

prolonged resistance to attainment. Moreover, as Schopenhauer points out, our episodes of striving are not isolated events, but occur simultaneously in vast legions, some of which conflict with one another: "For every wish that is fulfilled, at least ten are left denied" (*WWR1*, §38: 219). With this is mind, it is the striving being *as a whole* that is to be taken into consideration; the amalgamation of ever-regenerating and unchosen pursuits that are in everyday circumstances distributed across "a hundred little bouts of moodiness and depression" (*WWR1*, §57: 343).[14]

The model examples Schopenhauer gives in support of this twofold connection between pain and striving are of that of nutrition and reproduction, that is, hunger, thirst, and sex. These 'natural' desires – being most basic to human survival – are frequently regenerative and their frustration is most clearly associated with pain. But Schopenhauer, following Epicurean and Stoic traditions, is attentive to how this cycle of craving, striving, and suffering pertains no less to 'artificial' desires generated by social relations and convention, that is, wealth, prestige, friendship, influence, and power (*PP1*, §6: 289–290). Such desires are also arguably more prevalent in the twenty-first century than they were in Schopenhauer's day. Not only has global capitalism reached a stage where there is a seemingly endless stream of products available for purchase – products that the advertising industry is solely dedicated to convincing us we *need* – but the world today is significantly more interconnected. The artificial need for prestige in particular, and its accompanying anxiety, is, Schopenhauer would have surely observed, amplified exponentially by the phenomenon of social media (see *PP1*, §6: 303–304).

But things get worse. A third step in the argument concerns the nature of the state of attainment. Although, on Schopenhauer's view, life is a series of episodes of (predominantly failed) striving to satisfy desires, we sometimes do get what we want, and sometimes without struggle. At least for a short while before new desires arise, there seems to be freedom from suffering. But Schopenhauer then makes the following move:

> If on the other hand [any sentient animal] lacks objects to will, its former objects having been quickly dispelled as too easily achieved, it is seized with a terrible emptiness and boredom: i.e. its essence and its being itself become an intolerable burden to it. (*WWR1*, §57: 338)

The claim here is that if one lacks objects of willing to strive towards – for example, if desires are satisfied too easily, or few objects stir one's

[14] On this point I agree with Janaway (1999: 329–330); Bather Woods (2014: 56–57).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sustained interest – then one falls victim to additional torment: boredom. For Schopenhauer, "Boredom is certainly not an evil to be taken lightly: it will ultimately etch lines of true despair onto a face" (*WWR1*, §57: 339), citing "Philadelphia's strict penitentiary system", whose practice of solitary confinement "makes boredom into an instrument of punishment", often resulting in driving "convicts to suicide" (*WWR1*, §57: 340). In this case, at least part of the pain inflicted upon the inmates is in giving them *just enough* to stay alive, but denying them any objects of interest to pursue.[15] The profound effect boredom has on the human psyche is evidenced by the extreme ways it can drive people to (1) "the greatest licentiousness" of excess and (2) anarchy (*WWR1*, §57: 339–340). The first – which we might call 'the Boredom of Croesus' – is the typical means the affluent have to deflect the pain of boredom. Schopenhauer writes:

> their very wealth becomes a punishment, delivering them into the hands of tormenting boredom. In order to escape it they try everything, running, creeping and travelling around, and scarcely arrived, they anxiously inquire everywhere about the *night clubs* of the place, just as the needy man inquires about its *sources of aid*. (*PP2*, §153: 265)

The affluent have the means of too often achieving their ends with ease, and Schopenhauer takes this to *explain* the tremendous excess these societies produce as attempts to distract from boredom: "hence luxury, delicacies, tobacco, opium, alcoholic liquors, pomp, display, and all that goes with this" (*PP2*, §153: 265; cf. *WWR1*, §57: 340). While the world's poorest suffer in striving to meet their *needs*, the world's richest – the "world of fashion" – suffer from their *trivial wants* and lack of sustained interests.

The second coping mechanism for boredom Schopenhauer gives – 'anarchy', or what we might call 'the Boredom of Nero' – is, more specifically, violence and malice. Such is the need for something to strive towards in order to keep us occupied that it often provokes humans to "pick a quarrel, hatch a plot, or get [themselves] involved in fraud and all sorts of depravities, only to put an end to the unbearable state of peace" (*PP1*, §6: 386; *PP2*, §152: 264). How might this happen? Schopenhauer refers to a process of strain-relief whereby if the "excessive pressure of the will" cannot be released because there are no goals to pursue, or the goals available are achieved too easily, then in order to avoid "the most horrible

[15] For critical attention to Schopenhauer on boredom, and specifically its use as an instrument of punishment, see Bather Woods (2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

desolation" and "eternal unrest" of boredom, one "will try to mitigate his own sufferings through the sight of other people's" (*WWR1*, §65: 391).

Both examples – excess and cruelty – motivate Schopenhauer to refer to boredom as a type of lack or "empty longing" (*WWR1*, §58: 347): even though we suffer in striving, we need to strive in order to escape the pain of boredom.[16] This framework places the human experience between inevitable and diametric episodes of affliction, an exhausting and endless oscillation in which "life swings back and forth like a pendulum between pain and boredom; in fact, these are the ingredients out of which it is ultimately composed" (*WWR1*, §57: 338). This analysis of the intrinsic phenomenal quality of human activity and inactivity as primarily characterised by unease and perturbation allows Schopenhauer to claim that the hedonic scales are weighted, a priori, towards the negative, that life's suffering will very likely outweigh life's pleasures.

As dire as this situation sounds, a fourth and final step that completes Schopenhauer's argument is to block the optimist's channel of recourse. It is evident that sometimes we *do* achieve our goals. The pessimist must therefore (1) avoid denying such pleasures ever occur or (2) avoid wholly ignoring them in their hedonic calculations. Schopenhauer is quite aware of this, and attempts to deflate the concern in the following way:

> All satisfaction, or what is generally called happiness, is actually and essentially only ever *negative* and absolutely never positive. It is not something primordial that comes to us from out of itself, it must always be the satisfaction of some desire. (*WWR1*, §58: 345)

Again following the Epicureans – as well as Kant (see Section 1.1) – a logical precondition of happiness is want or desire, but attainment (happiness) is then more appropriately described as *relief* from painful striving rather than gratifying *in-itself*: "we never gain anything more than *liberation*" from desire (*WWR1*, §58: 345–346, emphasis mine). Call this the Negativity Thesis. Schopenhauer later expresses the thesis in the following way:

> We feel pain, but not painlessness; we feel worry, but not freedom from worry; we feel fear but not security. We feel a desire as we feel hunger and thirst; but as soon as it is fulfilled, it is like a bite of food we have enjoyed, which stops existing for our feeling the moment it is swallowed.... For only

[16] This interpretation of willing in terms of a second-order desire to have first-order desires is explicit in Reginster (2006: 122); Fernández (2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> pain and lack can be felt positively and therefore register their presence: well-being on the other hand is merely negative. (*WWR2*: 590)

Schopenhauer goes on to offer the "three greatest goods in life" – health, youth, and freedom – as examples that operate on this basis: we only register them phenomenally in their absence, and they offer no positive hedonic value when obtained. This formulation of the thesis in *WWR2*: 590 is ambiguous, however, given that the claim that (1) 'pleasures are never *positively felt*' is neither equivalent to nor entailed by the claim that (2) 'pleasures are *conditional upon the extinguishing of pre-existing pain*'. Both claims are controversial, to say the least, but Schopenhauer tends to run them together. The intention, I take it, is to argue, again contra Leibniz, that the pleasure of satisfaction is exclusively in the *cessation* of a pain (see *PP2*, §149: 263). The philosophical import of this commitment is that the hedonic scales are, from the start, lopsided, and *at best* could only ever return to net zero in principle.[17]

Despite Schopenhauer's frequent balancing of happiness and suffering, in the end he seems to take the Negativity Thesis to render to the practice "besides the point" (*WWR2*: 591). In characteristically mercantile terms, Schopenhauer writes:

> For human existence, far from having the character of a *gift*, has the completely opposite character of *guilty indebtedness*. The collection of this debt appears in the form of the urgent requirements, tortured desires, and endless need, all introduced by human existence itself. Usually the whole span of life is spent paying off this debt, but this only pays off the interest. The capital is paid back in death. – And when was this debt contracted? – In procreation. (*WWR2*: 595)

Nevertheless, Schopenhauer seems to allow that *some* pleasures can come 'unbidden'; that is, they do not depend upon a pre-existing desire, for example, the unexpected smell of freshly cut grass on a summer's walk, "purely intellectual pleasures", or conscious awareness of our causal powers (see *WWR1*, §58: 340; §55: 332). But such is the volatile and fleeting nature of these pleasures, as well as their relative infrequency and diminishing returns, that they are unlikely to significantly affect the hedonic

[17] Contemporary attention to the philosophical issues surrounding this thesis can be found in Simmons (2021). For a response to Simmons' objections to what can be described as the orthodox view I provide above, see Bather Woods (2022). It will shortly become clear that many of these points were already anticipated by Hartmann, and others, at the peak of the pessimism dispute.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

balance.[18] In anticipation of what contemporary psychologists refer to as the 'law of hedonic asymmetry',[19] Schopenhauer explicitly draws attention to this point: "Our sensitivity for pain is almost infinite, while that for pleasure has narrow limits" (*PP2*, §148: 309). While apparently recognising the existence of *some* positive pleasures then, Schopenhauer takes their asymmetrical relation to pain to hardly threaten the pessimist's estimation of life: "Whoever would like to briefly test the assertion that pleasure outweighs pain in the world, or that they are at least in equilibrium, should compare the feelings of the animal that devours another with those of the one being devoured" (*PP2*, §149: 263).

In conjunction with the previously presented claims that (1) striving is inherently painful; (2) boredom is inherently painful; and (3) the will is restless and insatiable, the Negativity Thesis leads Schopenhauer to conclude, famously, that "life is a business that does not cover the costs" (*WWR2*: 574). This completed argument, if sound, entails that suffering is not merely an accidental feature of life that one might eradicate, but a fundamental feature of what it means to exist as an embodied being. The human predicament is tragic, for our psycho-physiology is such that we are not equipped with the means to attain the constituents of our own well-being:

> If suffering is not the closest and most immediate goal of our life, then our existence is the most inexpedient thing in the world. For it is absurd to assume that endless pain, which springs from the distress that is essential to life and of which the world is everywhere full, should be pointless and purely accidental.… Each individual misfortune appears to be an exception, to be sure, but misfortune generally is the rule. (*PP2*, §148: 309)

While some appear well-off in virtue of their relative health and financial advantages, for example, this is superficial: as essentially *striving* beings they too are caught in the endless cycle of restless frustration, even if its channels differ. While Schopenhauer can (and does) consistently allow that the alleviation of some suffering is possible,[20] the idea so fundamental to

[18] Of the specifically "intellectual" (e.g., *aesthetic*) pleasures, they are grounded precisely in the *elimination* of desire. Schopenhauer nonetheless thinks these too are rarely experienced in any prolonged state to be significant in striking a positive hedonic balance for the majority of lives (*WWR1*, §58: 340). For an alternative view that plausibly defends a reading of Schopenhauer's Negativity Thesis about *all* pleasures by appealing to a distinction between *satisfaction* and *distraction* from painful desires, see Fox (2022).

[19] See Rozin (1999: 109–133).

[20] For example, he praises the British for taking steps to prevent animal cruelty (*OBM*, §19: 230), and he clearly thinks the abolition of slavery is to be commended (*OBM*, §18: 218). Some interpreters have taken this as evidence that Schopenhauer's pessimism eventually dampens and that he even comes to believe that "things could be improved to such an extent that life could be a *good* thing,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Enlightenment thinking that suffering might be a problem that could be eradicated through increases in wealth or social engineering is a myth he is keen to dispel:

> The perpetual efforts to banish suffering do nothing more than alter its form. This is originally lack, need, worries over how to sustain life. If (and this is extremely difficult) we are successful in driving out pain in this form, then it immediately appears in a thousand others, varying, according to age and circumstances, as sex drive, passionate love, envy, jealousy, hatred, anxiety, ambition, greed, illness, etc., etc. If it ultimately cannot find any other form in which to appear, then it comes in the sad grey garments of satiety and boredom, and we then try hard to fend it off. Even if we finally succeed in driving these away, it can hardly be done without letting the pain back in one of its previous forms and so beginning the dance all over again; because every human life is thrown back and forth between pain and boredom. (*WWR1*, §57: 341)

Schopenhauer's a priori argument for pessimism was certainly influential in the pessimism dispute, but it was not the only hedonic argument given in support of the thesis, nor was it the one that gained the most notoriety.

One of the primary criticisms of Schopenhauer's argument came from the later pessimists themselves. While they agreed with his conclusion that life could not be worth living given the amount of suffering there is in the world, they were concerned that Schopenhauer's Negativity Thesis was not the best means of defending it, vulnerable as it is to counter-examples. Hartmann (*PU*, XIII: 13–14), Plümacher (*PVG*: 3), and Mainlander (*PE*: 467) all attack the Negativity Thesis on these grounds. Hartmann, for example, writes, "I do not in the least intend to dispute that every removal or diminution of a pain is a pleasure, but not every pleasure is a removal or diminution of a pain" (*PU*, XIII: 13), and offers as examples the positive pleasures of "hope" (*PU*, XIV: 72), sexual gratification "taken as purely physical" (*PU*, XIII: 14), and "the enjoyments of agreeable taste and those of art and science" (*PU*, XIII: 14). By including artistic pleasures, Hartmann makes a clear departure from Schopenhauer's conception of aesthetic experience as pleasure in the cessation of willing – something Hartmann considers incoherent (*PU*, XIII: 14).

There are certainly question marks over the strength of this objection. As we noted, it is not quite fair to say that Schopenhauer outright denied the existence of 'positive pleasures', but rather, in his more careful

not just a less bad thing" (Shapshay 2019: 20, 88). I have expressed doubts about this in Hassan (2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

moments, he deemed them to be few and far between, and of such insignificance compared with pains that they would barely affect the hedonic balance. But Hartmann comes to endorse only what he interprets to be a distinctive, weaker version of the Negativity Thesis, according to which *some* of the goods in life – albeit some of the most important: health, freedom, and security – are not positively felt. He takes this weaker version, however, to place a large dent in the case for the descriptive component of pessimism. So how does Hartmann's hedonic argument attempt to fill this gap and improve upon Schopenhauer's?

It is worth mentioning at the outset why Hartmann's criticisms and his version of the hedonic argument warrant consideration. When his *Philosophie des Unbewussten* was first published in 1869, it generated so much controversy in German intellectual circles – provoking hundreds of reviews, critical responses, articles, and books – that it was Hartmann who became the face of pessimism from the 1870s onwards, and not Schopenhauer. Hartmann's system undertook the mammoth task of attempting to reconcile Schopenhauer's philosophy of the *Wille* with Hegel's historical *Weltprozess*, in which over time mankind becomes increasingly conscious of the teleological character of human freedom. At various points in this monograph, the many tensions in this extravagant metaphysical project will become apparent. As we shall see, they provoked Nietzsche's sharpest rebukes, but also attracted his sustained philosophical attention. But for our present aims, it is enough to say that Hartmann takes each individual human life to be one characterised by misery and suffering, simply a cog in a historical machine that pays no concern to the happiness of each person within it. His inductive method leads him to harness the following claims as evidence.

(1) Both pleasure and pain can be positively felt, but their conceptual relation "tells in favour of pain" (*PU*, XIII: 13): pleasure and pain, Hartmann tells us, "attack the nervous system", and because of this the longer they go on they each "produce a kind of fatigue [*Ermüdung*], which, with the highest degree of pleasure, may become fatal atony" (*PU*, XIII: 13; cf. *PVG*: 138). The point here is not obvious, but I take the claim to be that *both* the pain and the pleasure a subject may experience produce a painfully felt need for their cessation the more they continue. Pains are felt twice over: we feel the original pain (e.g., a toothache) *plus* fatigue, which involves a prolonged desire for the original pain to cease. In the case of pleasures, the longer they heighten our sensation the duller, more banal, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tiresome they become as our exhaustion works against the original delightful sensation, reducing our overall experience to one of apathy at best. As Hartmann puts it: "Pain is . . . the more painful, pleasure the more indifferent and cloying, the longer it lasts" (*PU*, XIII: 13).

It is worth noting that Hartmann's point here seems to have been anticipated by David Hume – one of Schopenhauer's philosophical heroes – who astutely observed in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* that

> Pleasure, scarcely in one instance, is ever able to reach ecstasy and rapture: And in no one instance can it continue for any time at its highest pitch and altitude. The spirits evaporate; *the nerves relax; the fabric is disordered; and the enjoyment quickly degenerates into fatigue and uneasiness*. But pain often, Good God, how often! rises to torture and agony; and *the longer it continues, it becomes still more genuine agony and torture. Patience is exhausted*; courage languishes; melancholy seizes us; and nothing terminates our misery but the removal of its cause, or another event, which is the sole cure of all evil, but which, from our natural folly, we regard with still greater horror and consternation.[21]

Hartmann does not acknowledge this anticipation of his view in Hume. Nevertheless, his argument in support of the descriptive component of pessimism, as we can now see, hinges upon Hume's claim here: it is *not* the case that all pleasure is merely the cessation of a painful desire. Rather, where positive pleasures are possible, they are almost always accompanied by an even greater quantity of pains. None of these pains are ever adequately compensated for by the brief pleasure that is sought after. Maintaining the mercantile language of Schopenhauer, Hartmann therefore asserts: "The world accordingly resembles a money-lottery: the appointed pains one must pay in full, but the gains one receives only with a deduction" (*PU*, XIII: 22).

(2) Another observation Hartmann offers is that desires for social goods such as wealth, love, power, honour, respect, and fame – as well as being accompanied by overcompensating pains of the kinds described in (1) – are *boundless*. Not only do they have no intrinsic limit, but our desires for them are *incremental*: the more we acquire, the *greater* the desire for them becomes, not weaker. As a result, the harder it becomes (and the less likely one is) to satisfy one's desires. Let us call this the Insatiability Thesis.

[21] Hume (2008 [1779]: Part X: 102, emphasis mine).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Insatiability Thesis was by no means a new discovery by Hartmann. We have already seen that Schopenhauer endorses it, and in doing so he follows in the footsteps of Montaigne, Hobbes, and Rousseau. There are two ways pain is allegedly related to this thesis. Because we can never be assured that we have 'enough' power, wealth, fame, and so forth, we attempt to procure as much as we can: "the more one drinks of it, the thirstier one becomes" (*PU*, XIII: 56). While this perpetual pursuit is a source of great frustration, there are also the social effects of each individual's competitive interests in such goods. Hartmann's distinction between 'subjective honour' and 'objective honour' makes this point clear: the former denotes our own estimation of self-worth; the latter denotes the general estimation of one's worth by others (*PU*, XIII: 49–56). Because people typically take the latter to be a serious matter, it creates rivalry, conflict, and struggle. As Hobbes noted, it is all too easy for such competition over glory, fame, and power to descend into "contention, enmity, and war".[22] Consequently, of these types of good, Hartmann concludes that overall "they procure for him who is possessed by them a thousand times more pain than pleasure" (*PU*, XIII: 52).

(3) A third claim Hartmann makes to defend the descriptive component of pessimism is that humans are far more affected by painful experiences than they are by pleasurable ones, even where they appear equal in intensity and duration. We have already discussed two types of hedonic asymmetry that Schopenhauer, and Hartmann, accepted:
   (i) (Most) pleasures are felt *negatively* – as a relief from suffering – whereas pains are *positively* felt.
   (ii) Positive pleasures tend to be *less intense* and *shorter in duration* than overall pains.

But Hartmann also endorses a third hedonic asymmetry expressed in (3): our sensitivity to pain far outstrips our sensitivity to pleasure. Hartmann gives the following example:

> If I have the choice either of not at all hearing, or of hearing first for five minutes discords and then for five minutes a fine piece of music; if I have the choice either not to smell at all, or to smell first stench and then a perfume; if I have the choice either not to taste, or to taste first something disagreeable and then something agreeable, I shall in all cases decide for the non-hearing, non-smelling, and non-tasting, even if the successive

[22] Hobbes (1996: chapter XI: 66). Hobbes' careful analysis of the nature of power more elegantly expresses Hartmann's essential points about (1) insatiability and (2) social conflict.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

homogenous painful and pleasurable sensations appear to me to be equal in degree. (*PU*, XIII: 21; cf. *PP2*, §148: 309; §149: 263)

(4) A final point Hartmann makes is that suffering increases with greater intelligence and cognitive ability. This claim is expressed in Ecclesiastes: "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow [*Qui auget scientiam, auget et dolorem*]". Hartmann says that "higher sensibility sufficiently explains why men of genius are so much more unhappy in their lives than ordinary men, to which must be added (at least among reflective geniuses) the penetration of most illusions" (*PU*, XIII: 77). Consider hope, for example: while Hartmann grants that it is indeed "a *very real pleasure*", he thinks that because of the illusive nature of happiness, hope is a "*contradiction and worthless*", an "*illusion*" whose "function is just to *dupe* us . . . in order only that we may endure to perform our yet uncomprehended task". The problem is that once a person has made use of science and philosophy to acquire the conviction that this is the case, it undercuts the basis for its pleasurable nature: they "very soon find [their] instinct of hope enfeebled and depressed by this cognition of understanding" (*PU*, XIII: 72–73).

The idea that more complex cognitive abilities increase the *capacity* for suffering was expressed by many in the nineteenth century, not all of them pessimists. John Stuart Mill, for example, noted the same general correlation: "A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type."[23] Mill, however, thought that higher faculties also open the door to more complex and substantial kinds of pleasures that can offset these deeper pains. In adopting the stronger claim that there is general correlation between gradations in intelligence and *aggregate decreases in well-being*, Hartmann is again allied with Schopenhauer, who states the idea clearly: "An increase in pain is directly correlated with an increase in clarity of cognition and an increase in consciousness; consequently, pain reaches its highest pitch in human beings, and even there continues to grow in proportion to cognition and intelligence; the man in whom genius dwells suffers the most" (*WWR1*, §56: 336; cf. §58). Since both Hartmann (and Schopenhauer) sensibly do not deny that greater cognitive capacities *also* enable greater

[23] Mill (2001: 9).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pleasures – for example, of the arts and sciences – this indicates that part of what explains the truth of (4) is dependent upon the credibility of (1)–(3).

From this survey of Hartmann's multifaceted hedonic argument for pessimism, we can determine that his dispute with Schopenhauer ultimately looks less serious than he makes it out to be. Schopenhauer endorses (2)–(4); Schopenhauer's *Negativity Thesis* is not as strong as Hartmann proposes; Hartmann's commitment to (1) is a genuine philosophical difference, but as he notes will "practically yield almost the same result as the theory of Schopenhauer" (*PU*, XIII: 18; cf. 14). Further still, Hartmann seems to deploy a priori reasoning in (1) – through a conceptual analysis of pleasure's relation to pain – which is to be reinforced with empirical observation, a method we saw Schopenhauer explicitly endorse (*WWR1*, §59: 349).[24] Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century it was Hartmann's presentation of the argument that was perceived to be the most credible, and up to date with the emerging empirical sciences.

Hedonic arguments for pessimism continue, however, to strike many as incredible. Even though one might accept the axiological condition that life *would* fall short of being worth living *if* suffering essentially outweighed pleasure, many might find it hard to seriously entertain the idea that it *does*, on account of very strong intuitions to the contrary. Life, for most, *feels* to be very much worth living, and happiness something readily attainable. Hartmann anticipates this point, and, building upon Schopenhauer's psychological observations, offers a debunking explanation for this optimism, revealing the systematic causes for it. He begins by noting the difficulty in determining the hedonic value of life from an appropriate average standard:

> It is by no means asserted that every being draws the *correct* algebraic sum from all the affections of its life, or, in other words, that *its collective judgement* on its own life is a correct one in respect of its subjective experience. Quite apart from the degree of intelligence necessary for the pronunciation of such a summary judgement, there remains, in the first place, the possibility of errors of memoranda combination; and secondly, of a *bias of the judgement by the will and unconscious feeling*. (*PU*, XIII: 7)

The passage contains a number of distinct points, but particularly interesting is his identification of certain unconscious biases that can distort our own evaluations. One such bias, Hartmann contends, is the unconscious will's drive toward self-preservation. The love of life and to

[24] This particular point is noted by Janaway (2021: 224).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

persist in it "is nothing else but the instinctive impulse of self-preservation" (*PU*, XIII: 9), which in consequence makes "our judgement on the algebraic sum of the enjoyments and pains . . . corrupted and the impression of the experience just made glossed over by the new deceitful hope. This is the case with all the properly impelling passions, hunger, love, honour, avarice, &c" (*PU*, XIII: 10). The moral of the story, according to Hartmann, is that we should not necessarily trust people's own estimations about the value of life, since people are structurally prone to cognitive biases, especially biases towards a positive valuation, on this very issue.

Hartmann's point here can be read as an early approximation of the 'Pollyanna Principle', identified by psychologists Margaret Matlin and David Stang in the 1970s. This principle holds that average people tend to heavily focus upon, predict, and recall the positive aspects of living rather than the negative, and that "cognitive processes selectively favor processing of pleasant over unpleasant information".[25] The ways that this kind of bias can manifest are numerous, including "overestimating the size of valued objects, avoiding looking at unpleasant pictures, communicating good news more frequently than bad, and so on".[26] From both a Schopenhauerian and an evolutionary perspective this makes perfect sense: if we came to realise that life was actually a terrible burden and that its multitude of pains are rarely if ever compensated for, we might overcome our natural fear of death and cease to carry on living and propagating the species. This point has been more recently explored by evolutionary psychologists interested in the cognitive mechanisms that might have evolved over time to prevent suicide. The psychologist Cas Soper,[27] for example, has argued that humans are in a unique position among other species in one crucial respect. While all sentient creatures register pain, only humans are cognitively complex enough (1) to reflect upon death *as such* and (2) to intellectualise our pain by reflecting upon it, reasoning about whether and how it can be mitigated. As soon as one is able to do (1) – typically in middle to late childhood and early adolescence – the concept of suicide can be entertained, and thus one becomes vulnerable to it. A component of the intelligence required for (1) and (2) is an apprehension of oneself across temporal points. Schopenhauer forcefully made this same claim, writing that humans "surpass animals as much in power as in suffering. Animals live only in the present; humans, meanwhile, live

[25] Matlin and Stang (1978: 4). David Benatar (2006) makes explicit use of the Pollyanna Principle in his contemporary case for pessimism.
[26] Dember and Penwell (1980: 321). [27] Soper (2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

simultaneously in the future and the past" (*WWR1*, §8: 59; cf. *PP2*, §153: 265). As well as pains of anxiety over the future and the past, he notes the danger of comprehending death as such, uniquely facilitated by intelligence: "Animals only learn what death is in death itself: but human beings are conscious of drawing nearer to death with each passing hour. This makes life sometimes a rather dubious [*bedenklich*] prospect even for those who have not recognized that incessant annihilation is characteristic of life itself" (*WWR1*, §8: 60).

For Soper, what best explains a natural aversion to suicide is an evolved adaption for an optimistic disposition, constituted by (1) systematic self-deception as a means of *suppressing* pains and (2) a drive towards perpetual activity as a means of *distracting* from pains. Both of these mechanisms allow pain to register consciously as *exceptions* to the broader human experience rather than the rule. But according to Soper, this means that evolutionary selection pressures have produced adaptations that configure our psyche with a semi-illusory yet enhanced reality to experience. If this semi-illusory reality breaks down under the weight of chronic emotional distress, the brain naturally takes drastic emergency measures of a physiological kind to protect against suicide, symptoms of which are conditions usually considered 'disorders', such as depression, addiction, and psychosis.

Contemporary psychological analyses such as these have clear parallels with the proto-evolutionary psychological views evident in both Schopenhauer's and Hartmann's account of willing. Such analyses offer the proponents of hedonic arguments the means to account for intuitive feelings of attachment to life as what might be described as a kind of 'Existential Stockholm Syndrome': an irrational attachment to an oppressor, which in this case would be life itself. But as Hartmann recognises, a delusion about the quality of one's own life can be fairly *factored into* the subject's sum total estimation of life. If I experience some pleasure at the (erroneous) thought that my life is on balance very positive, this pleasure must itself contribute to my well-being; and if I more easily recall, predict, or focus upon pleasures than pains, these are still feelings, and must therefore affect my hedonic levels of well-being. But if it turns out that there are good reasons to think that my calculation about the sum total of good may be systematically warped, then any positive expression of the value of life I may give should not necessarily be the final say in the matter. This is where philosophy ought to be able to step in, Hartmann claims, with an impartial and fair analysis of the nature of happiness and the prospects for its attainability.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hedonic arguments became the de facto justification for philosophical pessimism at the end of the 1860s, and for this reason they became a focus of critique from Nietzsche in his mature works. To be able to fully appreciate this critique later on, hedonic arguments have thus demanded more in-depth treatment. But there was a third type of argument for pessimism also worth drawing attention to.

'Idealistic' Arguments

A third type of argument for pessimism holds that because our ultimate values are unachievable, or are always accompanied by incomparable loss, life takes on a tragic character, such that non-existence is preferable to existence. Ultimate values might be broadly characterised as those that are good for their own sake, are felt to generate normative demands immune to compromise, and orient the subject's general life-trajectory in a way felt to be meaningful. Idealistic arguments for pessimism leave open which values can have this form, be they moral, epistemic, political, or aesthetic.

To take one example: many understand freedom to be an ultimate value, and thus a necessary and/or sufficient condition for a life worth living. From here, a pessimistic argument could be constructed by attempting to show that freedom cannot, or will likely rarely ever, be realised. Depending on the many different ways one might define 'freedom', this could be because it turns out the universe is deterministic in a way that necessarily precludes genuine autonomous choice; alternatively, it could be that the demands of human survival means we must live in large societies, which in turn demands that we have to sacrifice too much personal sovereignty to let life be worth living. A similar form of argument might plausibly be made for the intrinsic unreachability of other possible ultimate values: significant knowledge (i.e., metaphysical, scientific, moral), virtue, and so forth.

In a short but highly suggestive paper on pessimism from 1936, Cornelius Krusé points out how this kind of 'idealistic' pessimism can be a *result* of a value fallout caused by advances in the sciences and philosophy:

> I need only mention the pessimism that descended upon men from man's finding himself obliged to shift the centre of his universe in accordance with the teachings of Copernican astronomy. In the field of biology, the doctrine of evolution, by denying design and purpose in the universe and by appearing to dethrone man from his pre-eminence among animals, robbed the world of its "soul of loveliness", and man of his ancient dignity. Then

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> again, and more recently, the second law of thermodynamics plunged men like Henry Adams into deeply pessimistic thinking. Likewise, psychological determinism, resembling the denial of freedom of earlier days, but proceeding on different grounds, was not without its pessimistic repercussions.[28]

One concern that drives pessimistic arguments such as these is the idea that without ultimate values, our lives might be ignoble or undignified, condemned to an existence of merely snatching at short-lived pleasures and doing our best to avoid pains. A good life, on this view, is a *dignified* life, where dignity is rooted in striving for ultimate values. This axiological condition was accepted by many critics of utilitarianism in the nineteenth century, for example, who thought that its explicit hedonism precluded a dignified life and that it was thus a doctrine fit for swine, as Thomas Carlyle famously quipped. John Stuart Mill took this objection seriously, and wrestled with the tensions between dignity and pleasure, sensitive as he was to a potentially pessimistic reading of utilitarian theory.[29] As we shall see, Nietzsche came to endorse a version of this axiological condition entertained by the likes of Carlyle (see Section 7.2). Furthermore, the idea that hedonism might be an unwelcome *result* from the impossibility of realising our ultimate values, and not an axiological starting point, will prove to be a crucial distinction in Nietzsche's later comparison of Schopenhauer with other pessimists such as Hartmann and Philipp Mainländer (see Section 7.5).

But why think our ultimate values are intrinsically unrealisable? One pessimism of the type under consideration was advanced by Julius Bahnsen. Briefly, Bahnsen's pessimism is rooted in a metaphysical claim that reality is contradictory through and through (*WWW*: 97–98).[30] While this sounds very similar to the conclusion of Schopenhauer's 'metaphysical argument', Bahnsen's reasons for endorsing this claim are in many ways radically anti-Schopenhauerian.[31] Perhaps most clearly, Bahnsen accepted the Schopenhauerian claim that Will is the essence of reality, but he attempted to combine this with Hegelian dialectic. He accepted Hegel's postulation of two opposing forces – a 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis' – that animate world history. But Bahnsen forbade the possibility of their synthesis, which is the hallmark of teleological progress in any *Weltprozess*.

[28] Krusé (1932: 397). [29] See Fox (2021).
[30] For a canonical overview of Bahnsen's philosophy, see Heydorn (1952); Besier (2016: 229–284).
[31] For attention to these many differences, see Slochower (1932: 375–376, 381–382).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bahnsen's term for this process is *Realdialektik* and forms the basis of his diagnosis of reality as irrational and contradictory. Bahnsen typically proceeds inductively to reach this point, beginning with observations of contradiction in local domains and then moving to establish more general principles that account for wider patterns of observation in the world.

Important for the 'idealistic' argument-type presently being considered is that Bahnsen's metaphysics of contradiction manifests itself in the human experience as a futile struggle towards our ultimate values and ideals, in which we will always fall short. In a world that is itself contradictory and irrational, humans and all other conscious creatures are mere debris witnessing perpetual catastrophe. In *Das Tragische als Weltgesetz und der Humor als ästhetische Gestalt des Metaphysischen* (*TWH*) from 1877, Bahnsen for these reasons finds that the structure of life mirrors the essence of tragedy. Tragic heroes must choose between values, and will fail in some important respect no matter what is chosen (*TWH*: 50–51, 87). Their lives are characterised by a conflict in duties, but without resolution. In this way tragedy best represents the contradictory nature of the world. It's not that there are no values; on the contrary, there are, and they are extremely demanding. The problem, rather, is that obtaining one good always comes at the expense of other goods. As a result, our ethical outlooks will be typically be dominated by feelings of regret, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and indecisiveness.

One way of illustrating the pessimistic character of this view is in contradistinction with two well-known features of Kant's moral philosophy. The first is that (1) there are no genuine conflicts in moral duty. The second is that (2) the highest good is happiness in proportion to virtue. Bahnsen denies (1), showing a commitment to a form of irreducible pluralism about values and corresponding duties to realise them that do not vary across historical periods (*WWW*: 223–224). This pluralism inevitably leads to clashes, not only because it is simply false that what we ought to do is always clear, but because the realisation of one duty typically forfeits others. Bahnsen denies that (2) is possible to achieve. Kant's view that the highest good is happiness in proportion to virtue is one enabled by his theistic commitments, and resembles the traditional story of how suffering in this worldly life will, on the condition of virtue, be compensated for and redeemed in a blissful afterlife. For Bahnsen, there is no heaven or God to guarantee harmony between virtue and happiness, but it is also an unrealistic hope in this life: because virtue is ultimately grounded in compassion for those who suffer (*WWW*: 170, 182, 211–212), and suffering is ubiquitous, our pursuit of virtue will inevitably conflict with

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

our own happiness.[32] What Bahnsen's 'idealistic' argument for the lamentable nature of life demonstrates is that, contrary to accusations by their opponents, pessimists are in fact highly moralistic in their outlook. For them, the world ought to be a certain way but, as a matter of fact, *systematically* falls short of that standard. In other words, the problem with life is not our values or a lack of them; it's with the world.

This section has outlined three distinctive forms of argument for pessimism present in the nineteenth century: (1) metaphysical, (2) hedonic, and (3) idealistic arguments for pessimism. Hedonic arguments for pessimism remained the most often discussed in the Pessimismusstreit, but the appropriate priority among (1)–(3) will, as we shall see in Section 7.5, become of key importance to Nietzsche's assessment of the post-Schopenhauerians relative to the pessimism of his 'great teacher'. Before addressing Nietzsche's entry into the dispute, it is crucial to first address a second task that the pessimists, and Schopenhauer especially, were eager to undertake: to demonstrate the widespread endorsement of pessimism throughout the most profound traditions of human history.

1.3 The *Explanation*: Pessimism in Human History and Culture

When most people nowadays hear the claim that the world's non-existence would be preferable to its existence, they might either consider the asserter deeply troubled or think of the view as likely a part of an elaborate philosopher's ruse. Many of the philosophical pessimists held that such an analysis would, however, be rather intellectually shallow. A historical survey of human cultures, they argued, would reveal a pessimistic worldview embedded within the greatest traditions of thought. Hartmann, for example, prefaces his defence of pessimism by noting that it is far from a new and merely currently fashionable idea, but on the contrary that the "greatest minds of all ages" have pronounced "the condemnation of life in very decided terms" (*PU*, XIII: 1–2). Among the most ancient representatives Hartmann names Plato, and specifically *The Apology*, which includes Socrates' famous postulation of death as a blessing:

> For I think that if one had to pick out that night during which a man slept soundly and did not dream, put beside it the other nights and days of his life, and then see how many days and nights had been better and more

[32] The implication of Bahnsen's tragic worldview – that personal happiness is possible only through *detachment* from the suffering of others – is one that has ancient antecedents, and finds affinities with Nietzsche's critique of pity as having depressive effects (*A*, §7; *GS*, §338).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> pleasant than that night, not only a private person but the great king would find them easy to count compared with the other days and nights. If death is like this I say it is an advantage, for all eternity would then seem to be no more than a single night.[33]

This interpretation of Plato and Socrates as pessimists who pronounced "the condemnation of life", though controversial, is one that would resonate with Nietzsche (see *GS*, §340; *TI*: 'Socrates'; Section 5.2). But pessimism was more broadly identified as a widespread worldview in the comparative study of the world's religions. In many places throughout his corpus, Schopenhauer demonstrates an interest in, and acute sensitivity to, the nuances of religious history and belief, a feature of his thought that finds analogues in many of the later pessimists and, as we shall see, had a profound influence on Nietzsche's own association of pessimism with certain religious traditions. There are a number of steps to be taken to fully appreciate Schopenhauer's influential view.

First, it must be made explicit what Schopenhauer thinks religions essentially are and what they aim to do. For Schopenhauer, religion and philosophy are two very different means of satisfying the same need: what he calls "humanity's metaphysical need" (*WWR2*: 169). This need is for an explanation for why the world exists at all, and why it has the character that it does. Schopenhauer reiterates Plato's view that philosophy begins in wonder, a feature peculiar to human beings as the "*animal metaphysicum*" (*WWR2*: 169). But he develops this idea by holding that this wonder is more precisely a kind of *horror*: "doubtless it is knowledge of death, together with reflection on suffering and the needs of life, that give a strong impetus to philosophical deliberation [*Besinnen*] and metaphysical interpretations of the world" (*WWR2*: 170). Later in the same passage, Schopenhauer writes that "philosophical astonishment is at bottom one that is dismayed and distressed; philosophy, like the overture to *Don Juan*, starts with a minor chord" (*WWR2*: 181). Distinctive to *philosophical* explanations of the world is that they (ought to) proceed via argument, proofs, and aim at literal truth.

Nevertheless, even if suffering is ubiquitous, not all are suited to satisfying their 'metaphysical need' via abstract and robust philosophical argumentation. What religion essentially is, on Schopenhauer's view, is an alternative means of communicating metaphysical truths through *allegory*: "religions are . . . very good at taking the place of this metaphysics for the

[33] Plato (2000: lines 40b–41b).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

great mass of people, who cannot be obliged to think" (*WWR2*: 176). Although allegorical in nature and requiring faith rather than conviction through proofs, religion is no less potent in addressing the need that provokes it. As Schopenhauer writes: "[t]emples and churches, pagodas and mosques in all countries and all ages, with their grandeur and splendour, bear witness to the strong and ineradicable human need for metaphysics" (*WWR2*: 171). A danger, however, arises insofar as religion cannot, without undermining popular belief in itself, openly admit that its dogmas and parables are not *literally* true. For this reason, the institutions of religion and philosophy often clash, with religion attempting to suppress the advancement of philosophy (an outcome that history affords us many examples of). As a result, Schopenhauer endorses an elitism which holds that (1) the majority of people are not capable of metaphysical thinking, but also that (2) institutionalised religion is *only* the domain of the masses, and it cannot demand that "a Shakespeare, a Goethe ... be implicitly persuaded by the dogmas of any religion, in good faith and in the literal sense", as it would be like "demanding that a giant put on the shoes of a dwarf" (*WWR2*: 178).

Having clarified that religion in general is an allegorical means of grasping truths that are otherwise to be proved by philosophy, the second step is to ask what *kinds* of alleged truths the different religions aim at grasping. According to Schopenhauer, there is only one fundamental and category-defining kind:

> I cannot consider the *fundamental distinction* between religions to rest, as it commonly does, with the question of whether they are monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, but instead with the question of whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, i.e. whether they present the existence of the world as justified by itself and therefore praise it, or whether they regard it as something that can only be comprehended as a consequence of our guilt and that therefore should not really exist. (*WWR2*: 179)

So Schopenhauer's method of categorising the fundamental nature of the many different religions is by determining their *evaluative outlook* on existence. Religions can vary tremendously on the number of gods they postulate, how and where to worship, and so on. But, according to Schopenhauer, their fundamental natures are revealed by their expression of pessimism or optimism.[34] This is not only Schopenhauer's descriptive

[34] Schopenhauer does postulate, however, rough correlations between theism, realism, and optimism, on the one hand, and atheism, idealism, and pessimism, on the other. This is not strict, since there

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

account of the differences of religion, but also his criteria for establishing the *worth* of these religions: "The value of a religion will . . . depend on the greater or lesser amount of truth it contains beneath the veil of allegory" (*WWR2*: 178). In other words, the degree to which a religion allegorically captures the truth of pessimism is a measure of its merit. Pessimism, then, is neither equivalent to nor otherwise exclusive to atheism.

This brings us to the third step: Which religions, if any, are pessimistic, and which are optimistic? According to Schopenhauer, the religions that score poorly by being essentially optimistic in nature are Judaism, Islam, and Greco-Roman paganism. Although diverse in many respects, these religions either place little to no emphasis on a better afterlife to come (as is the case with Judaism), or otherwise take life on earth to be a kind of divine gift in which the good – that is, God's or the gods' plans – manifests in the realisation of (human) nature (as is allegedly the case with Islam and paganism).[35] Schopenhauer is not wholly condemning of Judaism. He does allow that the Old Testament contains the notion of original sin – one of the many Judeo-Christian concepts that, as we shall see, Schopenhauer retains and naturalises as a part of his pessimistic program: "The myth of original sin . . . is the only thing in the Old Testament to which I can assign a metaphysical truth, if only an allegorical one" (*WWR2*: 595). However, Schopenhauer qualifies this claim by holding that this notion is "probably, like the whole of Judaism, borrowed from the *Zend Avesta: Bundahishn*" (*WWR2*: 595).[36] That some of the central features of Judaism were heavily influenced by the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism was a popular view in Germany at the time of Schopenhauer's writing (as well as today),[37] and it is a view to which he commits himself elsewhere (*WWR2*: 639; cf. *PP2*, §156: 271; §177: 332; §179: 340–334).

In contrast to these optimistic religions, Schopenhauer applauds what he takes to be the pessimistic core of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Christianity. The criteria for establishing pessimistic doctrines is never

are clear examples of theistic-idealistic-optimism (e.g., Leibniz, Berkeley), as well as atheistic-realistic-optimism (and pessimism) in materialist thinkers.

[35] With the exception of the Sufi mystic tradition, Schopenhauer is especially disapproving of Islam in this respect: "[The Koran] shows us theism in its most impoverished and miserable form. Much can be lost in translation, but I have not been able to find a single valuable thought in it" (*WWR2*: 171).

[36] The *Avesta* is the primary collection of holy texts in the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism. The *Bundahishn* is a text that contains the Zoroastrian creation myth, in which the highest deity Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd) creates the world as part of the ongoing battle to defeat the evil Angra Mainyu (Ahriman).

[37] See Hassan (2021c: 635–640).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

precisely explicated by Schopenhauer,[38] but the closest he comes is in the following passage:

> [T]he great fundamental truth of Christianity as well as Brahmanism and Buddhism, namely the need for redemption from an existence given over to suffering and death, and our ability to attain this redemption by means of the negation of the will, that is, by assuming a decisive stand in opposition to nature ... is incomparably the most important truth that there can be. (*WWR2*: 644)

Three beliefs are offered as "the most important there can be":

(1) Life – full of suffering and death – is something that one ought to find *redemption* from.
(2) *Ascetic resignation* from life (i.e., purposeful denial of the will) is the means of achieving redemption.
(3) What is *natural* (e.g., basic human inclinations) *is evil/base/corrupt* insofar as it is an obstacle to redemption and cannot be intrinsically justified.

Each of these claims has its matching doctrine in each respective religion. In the dominant manifestations of the Christian tradition existence is openly perceived as a form of punishment for a moral deficiency, manifested through struggle and suffering. This moral deficiency (original sin) is the result of transgression against the divine law, traced back to and inherited from Adam. Humans occupy a fallen world in which the route back to God and a 'better world' to come is through resignation from our base and natural proclivities toward sin, themselves a source of suffering. But even ascetic resignation is not sufficient for this redemption – although guilty and undeserving, we must be reconciled to God and delivered from the sins of the flesh through his divine grace.[39]

This (brief) account of the Christian worldview satisfies (1)–(3) – the material world's (lack of) value is determined extrinsically by its defective relation to an original and perfect state of being, one that a person can hope to return to by denying their natural propensity to sin (i.e., to satisfy their egoistic desires) and receiving the grace of God. It is important to note that Schopenhauer attributes this insight only to the New Testament Christianity of the early church fathers, and in particular to the philosophy

[38] For a sustained investigation into the details of these criteria, see Vanden Auweele (2015).
[39] This overview does not do justice to the nuance of Schopenhauer's understanding of Christianity, nor his sensitivity to its fragmented history and disagreements of the various sects. For more detail than I can go into here, see Janaway (2017c).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Augustine.[40] He contrasts this 'authentic' Christianity with contemporary Christianity, which, under the influence of speculative metaphysicians and priests, "has forgotten its true meaning and has degenerated into trite optimism" (*WWR1*, §70: 433). For Schopenhauer, this is most unfortunate: "Do not think for a moment that Christian doctrine is favourable to optimism; on the contrary, in the Gospels, 'world' and 'evil' are used as almost synonymous expressions" (*WWR1*, §59: 352).

This close association of Christianity with pessimism is broadly echoed by Hartmann in his 1870 *Briefe über die christliche Religion* (102–103, 162, 220–221, 261), as well as his 1874 *Die Selbstzersetzung des Christenthums und die Religion der Zukunft*. It is also broadly shared by Plümacher, who identifies the Christian worldview with pessimism, though primarily in *sentiment* rather than insight, namely: "contempt for the world" (*Weltverachtung*) (*PVG*: 70) and "world-weariness" (*Weltmüdigkeit*) (*PVG*: 48). As the subsequent chapters will reveal, it cannot be emphasised enough how influential these analyses of Christianity as an expression of pessimism were to Nietzsche (see Section 5.4).

According to Schopenhauer, his pessimistic ethics "is in complete agreement with the whole of authentic Christian dogma" (*WWR1*, §70: 435). Yet he finds the same pessimism more directly expressed in the Indian religions of Buddhism and early Hinduism (Brahmanism) described in the Vedas and Upanishads:

> The innermost kernel and spirit of Christianity is the same as that of Brahmanism and Buddhism: they all teach a harsh guilty indebtedness of the human race by virtue of its very existence; except that, while those other ancient dogmas all proceeded in a direct and straightforward manner by positing guilt as a direct result of existence itself, Christianity does not do this, claiming instead that guilt is brought about through a deed performed by the first human couple. (*WWR2*: 619)

Schopenhauer considers Brahmanism's emphasis on the passage from ignorance (*avidya*) to knowledge (*vidya*) contained in the Katha Upanishad indicative of a pessimistic worldview. This intellectual journey is constituted by the realisation that the apparent individual self is an illusion, and the fleeting attachment to earthly possessions and desires is an obstacle to

[40] In *The City of God* (1998: Bk 29: 909–964) Augustine argued that the highest good of tranquillity or peace of mind is not possible to achieve in this worldly life on account of the misery and suffering within it. This claim was endorsed by the pessimists as a constitutive feature of their view, albeit additionally denying Augustine's claim that there exists an afterlife in heaven where this good *could* be achieved, and that the suffering of the world could be redeemed.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

this realisation. Failure to understand this results in the continued cycle of death in rebirth or reincarnation. The Buddhist tradition develops this core commitment, postulating as part of the Four Noble Truths that suffering (*dukkha*) is an intrinsic and pervasive feature of existence and that the primary cause of this suffering is craving or desire/attachment (*taṇhā*). The liberation (*moksha/magga*) from this cycle of existence (*Saṃsāra*) via ascetic resignation and detachment – ultimately leading to nothingness or an 'extinguishing' of suffering (*Nirvana*) – is the primary goal of these traditions. It is this religious framework and expression that Schopenhauer finds to be most closely embodying the pessimistic truth of the human condition.

The dualistic distinction between an earthy existence one ought to find redemption from and a 'better existence' to come through a renunciation of natural inclinations is central to Schopenhauer's positive appraisal of early Christianity, Brahmanism, and Buddhism. One key difference in their respective allegories is that instead of the *moral* deficiency that Christianity postulates as the source of guilt requiring punishment through existence, in the Brahman tradition this deficiency is *epistemic*. However, Schopenhauer's unique religious schema intimately connects these otherwise seemingly distant traditions. He writes that "Buddha's *Samsara* and *Nirvana* are identical with Augustine's two *civitates* into which the world is divided, namely the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas coelestis*" (*PP2*: 369). Furthermore, "the life of a Christian penitent or saint and that of an Indian [guru] . . . have exactly the same strivings and inner lives, despite such fundamentally different dogmas, customs and environments" (*WWR1*, §68: 416). So closely does Schopenhauer identify early Christianity with these two Indian religions that he frequently suggests that the latter must have somehow influenced the development of the former (e.g., *WWR2*: 640).

An important lesson to be taken from this discussion is that, for Schopenhauer, the bifurcation of philosophy and religion in no way undermines religion's proper function and value. Religious belief, for the philosophically untrained, can (1) satisfy humanity's need for metaphysical explanation, albeit allegorically rather than literally, and (2) make possible the denial of life via ascetic renunciation. It can perform these functions equally well for those unaccustomed to philosophy. The only feature of (pessimistic) religions that Schopenhauer rejects is the persistent attempts of theologians to rationalize them by insisting on the literal truth of their dogmas – a project that is hopelessly doomed to fail, like all speculative metaphysics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While praising religion's capacity for (1) and (2), Schopenhauer is nevertheless conscious of the many possible adverse effects of religious belief. He is acutely aware of the abuse of religion as a social institution, even of those religions he takes to embody genuine moral sentiment at their core. In particular, he notes how the seemingly mundane, repetitive ritual observances in religious practice – for example, making the sign of the cross, prayer five times a day, regular communion – can act as psychological apparatus that desensitise the agent to injustice by reconfiguring piety into simple obedience to ritual law. Schopenhauer is keen to point out the hypocrisy that can be the result:

> Those devils in human form, the slave holders and slave traders in the North American Free States (they should be called the Slave States), are orthodox and pious Anglicans, as a rule, who would consider it a grave sin to work on Sunday; and trusting in this and in their punctual attendance at church and so on, they hope for their eternal bliss – Hence the demoralizing influence of religions is less problematic than the moralizing one. (*PP2*, §174: 320; cf. §114: 193)

In the same passage Schopenhauer, reminiscent of Hume, writes that it is particularly forms of monotheism that have a proclivity for intolerance, the ugly consequences of which are often not merely silence and complicity in cases of injustice, but active creation of them. He lists the "fanaticism, the endless persecutions ... the religious wars", the "bloody madness" (*PP2*, §174: 320), "the religious persecutions and heretical trials, along with iconoclasm" (*PP2*, §174: 320) manifested in the Christian conquests in North and South America; the wars of Islamic expansion from the seventh century onwards; the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain; the destruction of temples and icons by both Christians and Muslims in India; the genocide of the inhabitants of Palestine by Moses and his followers upon reaching the 'Promised Land'; and so on. The crusades, Schopenhauer suggests, offer the clearest example of the paradox of rampant cruelty being justified by a religion that, at its fundamental core, is morally admirable: "think of the crusades ... a two-hundred-year utterly irresponsible slaughter, under the battle cry 'God wills it', for the purpose of conquering the tomb of the one who had preached love and tolerance" (*PP2*, §174: 320). In light of these historical horrors, he goes on to say:

> Truly, this is the worst side of religions that the faithful of each one consider everything to be permitted against those of all others and therefore treat them with the most extreme ruthlessness and cruelty; thus the

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Mohammedans against Christians and Hindus; Christians against Hindus, Mohammedans, native American peoples, Negroes, Jews, heretics and so on. (*PP2*, §174: 321–322)

Nevertheless, even while acknowledging these tendencies, Schopenhauer maintains a respect for the proper role of religious belief in satisfying 'humanity's need for metaphysics', even as an atheist himself.[41]

We can now determine two important conclusions about Schopenhauer's position on the relation between religion and pessimism. First, while religion is traditionally thought of as a *refuge* from pessimism or as an *antidote* to the existential pitfalls of widespread suffering, Schopenhauer demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case. This is not merely, as it might be expected, an inductive argument based upon the fact that religious wars and persecutions have caused – and likely will continue to cause – rampant misery and pain. Rather, Schopenhauer's primary point is that the major world religions *worth having* are valuable precisely because they are *expressive* of a pessimistic worldview at their core. The second important conclusion that can be determined up to this point is that, if Schopenhauer is right, pessimism is not a new thesis or a philosopher's clever ruse. Rather, it has been expressed *allegorically* and endorsed by millions as a serious assessment of the condition of existence for thousands of years. While striking the modern European reader as a radical thesis, Schopenhauer holds that pessimism is nevertheless "the most widely acknowledged fundamental truth in the whole of non-Islamic Asia, today just as much as three thousand years ago" (*WWR2*: 621). In 1836 he makes the same point abundantly clear:

> I beg my readers to take into consideration, that it is only in this north-western portion of the ancient continent, and even here only in Protestant countries, that the term paradoxical can be applied to [pessimism]; whereas throughout the whole of vast Asia everywhere indeed, where the detestable doctrine of Islam has not prevailed over the ancient and profound religions of mankind by dint of fire and sword, [pessimism] would rather have to fear the reproach of being trivially true. I console myself therefore with the thought that, when referred to the Upanishads of the Sacred Vedas, my Ethics are quite orthodox, and that even with primitive, genuine Christianity they stand in no contradiction. (*WN*: 377)

[41] Schopenhauer is less attentive to both ancient Egyptian religion and the religions of China, which the then available means for study were relatively meagre. Nevertheless, his comments on Egyptian polytheism are mostly positive, with his opinion of Confucianism and Daoism being more of a mixed bag. See Wicks (2013: 92).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Now that (1) the primary forms of pessimism have been disentangled, (2) the arguments for its dominant form in the nineteenth century have been presented, and (3) pessimism's claim to popularity in the world's many cultures and religions has been explained, we have set the stage for exploring Nietzsche's entry into the Pessimismusstreit.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009380287.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press